The Conversion of Augustine

From a hidden depth a profound self-examination had dredged up a heap of all my misery. . . . I threw myself down under a certain fig-tree and let my tears flow freely. . . . Suddenly I heard a voice from the nearby house chanting as if it might be a boy or a girl (I do not know which), saying and repeating over and over again "Pick up and read, pick up and read." At once my countenance changed, and I began to think intently whether there might be some sort of children's game in which such a chant is used. But I could not remember having heard of one. I checked the flood of tears and stood up. . . . I hurried back to the place where . . . I had put down the book of the apostle when I got up. I seized it, opened it, and in silence read the first passage on which my eyes lit: "Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts" [Rom. 13:13–14]. I neither wished nor needed to read further. At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from all anxiety flooded into my heart. All the shadows of doubt were dispelled. (8.12.28–30)

Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).